

Unit A: Driver's Role and Responsibilities

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I. Introduction

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The school bus driver plays a vital role in today's school system, a role that calls for the transportation of thousands of children in a safe, orderly, and efficient manner. **Slide 3** The bus driver (who represents the school division) is a dominant figure in the life of a student. The bus driver is often the first school representative to see the students in the morning and often the last to see them at night. The bus driver is an important person, not only to each student passenger, but also to the school division.

Discussion: How important is the school bus driver to the school system? What responsibilities does a school bus driver have?

Driving a school bus involves tremendous responsibility. **Slide 4** The bus driver has a responsibility to passengers, passengers' parents, school system, supervisors, fellow employees, the employer and to the public. To carry out these responsibilities effectively, a school bus driver must possess and draw upon a number of characteristics.

To increase the effectiveness as a school bus driver, she or he should display, at least, the following characteristics. **Slide 5** The bus driver must be:

- a. A responsible and upstanding person
- b. Able to gain the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to safely operate a school bus
- c. Able to demonstrate a positive attitude toward safe driving specifically and pupil transportation generally
- d. Alert and practice good judgment
- e. Concerned about the needs of the passengers
- f. Willing to practice patience and understanding
- g. Even tempered
- h. Physically and mentally prepared for the driving task

- i. Free from the effects of alcohol, illegal drugs, and medication
- j. Neat, clean, and properly dressed

Along with these characteristics, an essential factor in the success as a school bus driver is developing a positive self-image. **Slide 6** To help develop a positive self-image, remind the driver of the following:

- He/she is an important person
- They have a responsible job
- They are a member of a team

Discussion: From a student's prospective, why is transportation to and from school so critical?

Mass transportation, to and from schools, places a heavy responsibility for the lives and welfare of students. The responsibility for their safe transportation begins at the state level and flows through each school division to the school bus driver. All provide an important service to the commonwealth; all are responsible for the safety of the students, and all are members of the "Safety Team."

II. Requirements of the School Bus Driver

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8VAC20-70-280. Requirements for school bus drivers both for employment and continued employment.

Sections 22.1-178, 46.2-339, and 46.2-340 of the Code of Virginia require drivers of school and activity buses to:

1. Have a physical examination of a scope prescribed by the Board of Education with the advice of the Medical Society of Virginia and furnished on a form prescribed by the Board of Education showing the results of such examination.

a. No person shall drive a school bus unless that person is physically qualified to do so and has submitted a School Bus Driver's Application For Physician's Certificate signed by the applicant and the doctor or a licensed nurse

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practitioner for the applicable employment period.

b. The physical form describes the basic physical qualifications for school bus drivers; however, the examining physician or licensed nurse practitioner shall make the final determination of the individual's physical capacity to operate a school bus based upon their assessment of the individual's overall physical condition.

2. Furnish a statement or copy of records from the Department of Motor Vehicles showing that the person, within the preceding five years, has not been convicted of a charge of driving under the influence of intoxicating liquors or drugs, convicted of a charge of refusing to take a blood or breath test, convicted of a felony, or assigned to any alcohol safety action program or driver alcohol rehabilitation program pursuant to § 18.2-271.1 of the Code of Virginia or, within the preceding 12 months, has not been convicted of two or more moving traffic violations or has not been required to attend a driver improvement clinic by the Commissioner of the Department of Motor Vehicles pursuant to § 46.2-497 of the Code of Virginia.

3. Furnish a statement signed by two reputable persons who reside in the school division or in the applicant's community that the person is of good moral character.

4. Exhibit a license showing the person has successfully undertaken the examination prescribed by § 46.2-339 of the Code of Virginia.

5. Be at least 18 years old.

6. Submit to testing for alcohol and controlled substances that is in compliance with the Omnibus Transportation Employee Testing Act of 1991 (Public Law 102-143, Title V) as amended and is in compliance with 49 CFR Parts 40 and 382.

Statutory Authority

§§ 22.1-16, 22.1-177, and 22.1-178 of the Code of Virginia

Other Requirements

1. As a condition of employment, every school bus driver shall submit a certificate signed by a

licensed physician stating that the employee appears free from communicable tuberculosis. The school board may require the submission of such certificate annually, or at such intervals it deems appropriate. (**Code of Virginia, §22.1-300**)

2. No person shall drive any school bus on a highway in the Commonwealth unless he has had a reasonable amount of experience in driving motor vehicles, and has passed a special examination pertaining to his ability to drive a school bus with safety to its passengers and to other persons using the highways. Such person shall obtain a Commercial Driver's License with the applicable classifications and endorsements... (**Code of Virginia, §46.2-339**)

3. No person shall operate a school bus transporting pupils unless the person has:

a. Received classroom instruction, demonstration and behind-the-wheel instruction in accordance with a program developed by the Department of Education (**Code of Virginia § 22.1-181**).

b. Completed a minimum of 24 classroom hours and 24 hours of behind-the-wheel training. A minimum of ten of the 24 hours of behind-the-wheel time shall involve the operation of a bus with pupils on board while under direct supervision of a designated bus driver trainer. All drivers shall receive training in the operation of a Type D (transit) bus and transportation of students with special needs.

Note: The trainee must have obtained a fully endorsed Commercial Drivers License with the proper endorsements prior to operating a school bus with pupil passengers.

4. The driver of a school bus shall be under the general direction and control of the superintendent and school board or the supervisor of transportation, and shall also be accountable to the principal of the school to which transportation is provided.

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5. The driver of the school bus shall perform a daily pre-trip safety inspection of the vehicle prior to transporting children.

Refer to the “Virginia Commercial Driver’s Manual” for additional licensing information and requirements.

III. Responsibilities of the School Bus Driver

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The most important characteristic for success as a school bus driver is being responsible. The most important responsibility anyone can bear involves the lives and safety of other people. When driving a school bus loaded with children, drivers are accepting that responsibility. The safety of those aboard depends on the skills, judgment, attitude, and experience of the driver.

Discussion: How does the driver’s attitude impact his or her ability to safely perform their duties?

The driver’s skill, judgment, attitude, and experience must be developed and constantly refined. Pre-service training and in-service activities help the driver to develop the ability to cope with the constantly changing driving environment. The driver must constantly evaluate and re-evaluate how well he/she is meeting their responsibility and fulfilling the role of school bus driver (**8VAC20-70-360. In-service training**).

Besides the awesome responsibility of transporting pupils, the bus driver has other significant responsibilities.

A. Responsibility to Employer (school system)

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A school bus driver’s obligation to the school division, particularly to the school officials who are responsible for keeping the system running smoothly and efficiently, requires them to:

1. Turn in reports to the school principal or other designated official in a timely and efficient manner
2. Work closely with the school principal or designee and have a working knowledge of written school policy
3. Follow and uphold school board regulations. The school board expects each driver to observe the Motor Vehicle Laws of Virginia, all other laws and regulations prescribed by the state Board of Education and other state agencies relating to the transportation of the public.
4. Exercise the proper representation of facts
5. Exercise truth and accuracy in the presentation of records, documents and reports
6. Maintain good moral standings
7. Exercise proper conduct with regards to the health, welfare and morale of students and co-workers
8. Exercise appropriate use of assigned resources

B. Responsibility to Supervisor

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As allies in the “Safety Team” network, the bus driver and supervisors are vitally concerned and mutually involved with the safety of the school bus passengers, as well as the efficiency and economy of the transportation operation. To realize a safe and efficient operation requires mutual cooperation. A school bus driver must always be prepared to:

1. Accept responsibility
2. Accept authority
3. Exhibit professionalism
4. Complete all assignments to the best of their ability
5. Accept training and be willing to learn new ideas and techniques
6. Communicate openly with the supervisor

C. Responsibility to Fellow Employees

Discussion: How do employees’ attitudes towards each other affect the transportation operations?

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All members of the "Safety Team" must perform effectively to achieve a safe and efficient transportation operation. In order to promote harmony, follow these simple suggestions:

1. Assist new drivers to interpret rules and regulations
2. Assist others with reporting procedures
3. Assist other drivers in checking equipment
4. Assist other drivers with emergencies
5. Be courteous at all times
6. Address others in a professional tone and manner
7. Compliment the good work and deeds of others
8. Promote good working relationships at all times
9. Seek help from school officials to solve problems involving the driver and fellow employees

D. Responsibility to Students

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Besides being responsible for the safety of children on the bus, the driver has other obligations to the passengers as individuals, most of which relate to a professional relationship with them. Their conduct on the bus, in the classroom, and at home, depends, in varying degrees, on that relationship. Negative feelings can affect an individual's actions all day and/or evening long.

Discussion: How can negative interaction or communication affect the student? How does positive communication influence the student's attitude?

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1. Promote a positive relationship with passengers
2. To develop an overall positive environment, the school bus driver should:
 - a. Follow the designated schedule
 - b. Follow safe practices

- c. Maintain a clean bus
- d. Maintain high standards for personal habits
- e. Be consistent in the behavior towards pupils
- f. Speak courteously to students
- g. Use reasonable disciplinary measures, while following local school procedures
- h. Treat all students fairly and equally
- i. Develop rapport with the students, but maintain a friendly/businesslike relationship with them
- j. Acknowledge a student's good behavior
- k. Set a good example with safe driving practices and habits

E. Responsibility to Passengers' Parents

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Most parents are concerned for the safety of their children and will provide a positive force in assisting drivers with problems on the bus. Occasionally, through a lack of information or misunderstanding, some parents may react negatively to particular situations. The school bus driver should learn how to communicate properly and work with the passengers' parents.

1. Discussions with distraught parents should be conducted in a calm and professional manner
2. When necessary, impress upon parents their responsibility to have children at the bus stop on time
3. Always be on time, courteous, and cooperative
4. Exhibit concern for the safety of pupils by practicing good and proper driving habits at all times
5. Be receptive to parents' and students' suggestions and when appropriate, refer them to the proper school official
6. When necessary, advise parents that the safety of the busload is paramount. Passengers are expected to sit without causing a disturbance
7. Explain to the parents the local school board's operations policy
8. Don't hesitate to seek assistance from school officials to help solve problems involving members of the safety team

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Discussion: Discuss what the local policies are regarding interaction and communication between the driver and the parent.

F. Responsibility to the Public

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School bus drivers are a highly visible representative of the school system. The image he/she conveys to people, both as an individual and as part of the school system, is called public relations. The image people have of the driver influences their opinion of the school system itself. Each driver is important to the school division in the public relations picture.

Discussion: What does the high visibility of school buses and drivers mean to the school division?

G. Responsibility to "Yourself"

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The school bus driver is the most important part of school transportation. Actions and reactions to each situation will influence the safety and health of pupil passengers. Drivers can limit many potential hazards by maintaining good health, maintaining good habits and planning ahead. This will keep the driver focused on the safety sensitive task.

As an integral part of the educational system, the driver should be aware of various issues that can increase the risk of injury to him/her self or others.

Some of the issues are the use and abuse of prescribed over the counter medication, the use of illegal or illicit drugs and the use of alcohol. When alcohol and drugs are combined, the risks are further compounded.

Discussion: Discuss the federal requirements for drug and alcohol testing (49 CFR Parts 40 and 382).

The driver is also responsible for knowing and understanding the laws, regulations and local

policies that affect daily duties. When a driver operates a vehicle on Virginia's roadways, the driver has agreed to the Implied Consent law. This law allows law enforcement to have the blood, breath or urine tested if that driver is suspected of driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Failing to comply with certain laws could cause the driver's license of that person to be suspended or revoked.

Other factors such as a short or long term physical or a mental disability, chronic health conditions and sleep deprivation can affect driver performance. As a professional, the driver should notify the supervisor if such conditions exist. Being responsible to "yourself" is necessary for assuming the responsibility of others.

The school division also implements policies that protect the driver and the precious load from unnecessary incidents.

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Note: Give thought for a few moments to these facts:

During daily routes, the driver will have more contact with the public than any other school group because of the:

- Number of pupils transported
- The number of motorists and others in the environment

The public expects, as they should, proficient driving; they may cite poor performance.

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We have just discussed a few of the responsibilities a driver has to a variety of people. Responsibility is a significant characteristic of a professional school bus driver. There are no shortcuts to fulfilling those responsibilities, but school bus drivers should always remember to:

Convey professionalism
Be courteous
Communicate

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Display a positive attitude
Think

Being courteous will always promote good public relations. Communication enhances mutual understanding. A good attitude will touch in a positive way all those people with whom each driver comes into contact. Thinking permits actions to be guided by the knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences that the driver has developed and are constantly refining.

IV. Communications

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The two-way radio in the bus is there to improve transportation services provided by the school division. Two-way radios have proven to be efficient and effective, especially when information must be shared rapidly. Success depends on the type of equipment being used, the way the school division is laid out geographically, weather conditions, and how the bus driver uses the radio.

1. When to use the Two-Way Radio

Operating rules must be established for the use of two-way radios. These rules must be followed to ensure that Federal Communications Commission rules and local school board policy will not be violated. The radio is to be used to communicate the following:

- a. Heavy or unusual traffic conditions or hazards
- b. Bus failure or malfunction
- c. Crashes
- d. Any event requiring police, fire, or medical assistance
- e. Field trip problems and communications with other field trip buses
- f. Provide or request directions
- g. Any circumstance which the driver is in doubt about the proper action to take

These are acceptable uses for the radio in the vehicle. Two-way radios are never to be used for non-work related communication.

2. Federal Communications Commission Regulations

When information is transmitted over the radio, it is not only the concern of the school division, but also the concern of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). School divisions are given authority by the FCC to operate radio stations for the transmission of messages pertaining to either the efficient operation of the school bus service or the safety or general welfare of the students they are transporting.

This authority is provided in Title 47 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 90.15.

The FCC assigns frequencies, issues licenses, monitors the airwaves and enforces its regulations. FCC regulations forbid the following:

1. Use of the radio system by unauthorized personnel
2. Repair or change of frequency by unlicensed personnel
3. Obscene, indecent or profane language
4. Transmission of unassigned call letters
5. False calls
6. Fraudulent distress calls
7. Superfluous and unidentified communications
8. Operation of the radio system during a civil defense test

Note: Violation of federal regulations may result in loss of an FCC license.

3. Procedures for Using Two-Way Radios

The fundamentals of correct telephone usage apply to mobile radios. Choice of words, voice, volume, tone, professionalism, and good speaking habits are just as important as knowing how to operate the equipment properly. These pay off in getting the job done quickly and easily.

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- a. The first step when using the radio is for the driver to think about what he/she wants to say and condense the message as much as possible in the mind
- b. Remove the handset from its cradle
- c. Before pressing the transmit button on the handset, listen to see if another operator is already using the radio. If this is the case, wait and try again in a few moments. Don't break into another conversation unless a real emergency arises.
- d. When the frequency is clear, press the transmit button on the handset, wait a second, then request permission to transmit. For example: "Bus 123 to base." A light on the radio should come on, indicating that he/she is transmitting.
- e. After transmitting, wait a second, then release the button and wait for a reply. After 30 seconds, if the driver did not receive a reply, repeat the process. Remember: no one else can transmit while the transmit button is depressed.
- f. After the other operator acknowledges the call, talk directly into the mouthpiece in a moderate tone of voice. Speaking loudly will cause the transmission to "break up" or sound garbled. Speak slowly, distinctly, and calmly.
- g. Keep the message brief
- h. Follow codes whenever possible
- i. When repeating a message, speak more slowly, not louder
- j. Do not use jargon, slang, or obscenities
- k. Get the message acknowledged and make sure the driver acknowledges messages received
- l. When giving an address, it should be read digit-by-digit. For example: "1527" should be read: one-five-two-seven. If the other operator asks the driver to repeat the message; it should be read: fifteen twenty-seven
- m. Use the phonetic alphabet to "spell out" unusual words. Ask the other operator to "spell out" a word if clarification is necessary
- n. When an error is made in transmission, the word "correction" should be used and the correction made immediately
- o. Clear the frequency when the conversation is complete. Simply say, for example: "bus 123 clear". At the end of the transmission, return

the headset to its cradle and make sure that the transmission light is out.

- p. The radio may (depending on how it is installed) remain on when the bus' engine is turned off. Be sure to turn the radio off when all daily duties are complete.

Two-Way Radio Malfunctions

Report suspected radio malfunctions (failure to transmit or receive) to the transportation supervisor at the end of the route. Before the driver reports a suspected malfunction, check the following:

- a. Make sure the unit is turned on
- b. Make sure the volume control is set high enough
- c. Make sure the vehicle is not in a location where transmission is impeded by the terrain or buildings. Simply move to another location and try the radio again.
- d. Make sure the transmit light is not on when the handset is in the cradle. If the transmit light is on, the driver won't be able to receive. Re-set the handset in the cradle.

If the radio still does not work properly, report the malfunction as soon as practical.

Discussion: Discuss local policy on all forms of communications.

Unit Review

1. All public school bus drivers must be trained by a _____.
2. List the requirements for persons employed to drive school buses.
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____
 5. _____

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3. The Virginia Department of Education requires school bus drivers to have a minimum of _____ classroom hours of training and a minimum of _____ behind-the-wheel hours of training with a minimum of _____ of those training hours behind-the-wheel transporting pupil passengers.

4. In order to drive a school bus in the Commonwealth of Virginia you have to have a commercial driver's license with a _____ endorsement and a _____ endorsement.

5. If the school bus driver is convicted of _____ or more violations within the preceding twelve months, that person is no longer eligible to operate a school bus.

6. Federal law requires school bus drivers to be tested for illegal _____ and _____ use.

7. The school bus driver may be the _____ school representative a student has interaction with.

8. An effective transportation operation involves good communication between members of the safety team. Those members are

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

9. _____ is required prior to the first day of school and _____ is required during the second semester of school. These meetings provide critical information concerning the safe operations and good practices for school bus drivers.

10. The most important characteristic of a school bus driver is that of being _____.

11. The school bus driver should be _____ time and follow the designated _____.

12. School bus drivers should maintain a _____ and _____ relationship with their pupil passengers.

13. Your school system implements _____ that protect you and your precious load from unnecessary incidents.

14. School transportation communications devices should never be used for _____ related communications.

Answers

1. state certified driving instructor
2. physical, good driving record, 18 years old, character statements, submit to drug and alcohol testing
3. 24, 24, 10
4. passenger, school bus
5. 2
6. drugs, alcohol
7. first
8. employer, supervisor, fellow employees, students, parents, public, the driver
9. Pre-service, in-service
10. responsible
11. on, schedule
12. friendly, businesslike
13. policies
14. non-work